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ABSTRACT

Initiatives to bring about school improvement usually involve certain teachers taking on leadership roles. This paper presents findings of a study that examined the experiences of a small group of teacher leaders in schools that have demonstrated successful school improvement. The schools participated in a school-improvement project in England, conducted by a team of tutors at the University of Cambridge Institute of Education. The project, Improving the Quality of Education for All (IQEA), was based on shared decision making and school autonomy to enhance the work of teachers and to improve student outcomes. Data were obtained from interviews with a total of eight teacher leaders from four IQEA schools that demonstrated successful change. Findings illustrate the idea that change is learning--not so much as a metaphor about change, but as a reality for teachers managing change. These teachers were contributing to the development of professional learning environments in their respective schools. The teachers engaged with three closely integrated levels of activity within their schools. First, they strove in diverse ways to change, deepen, and broaden their own and their colleagues' perceptions of their schools. Second, as organizational structures and staff dynamics changed, the schools' cultures changed, leading to a productive blend of collegial challenge and support. Third, the collaborative culture facilitated professional learning. In conclusion, there is a need to develop more specific change strategies to help teachers interpret overall school improvement in terms of their own practices. (LMI)

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The Role of Leaders in School Improvement : Working with Rather than Working On

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Initiatives to bring about improvements in schools usually involve certain teachers in taking on leadership roles. Indeed it can be argued that the tasks undertaken by such individuals are important to the success or otherwise of such developments. What is it, then, that such teachers do when school improvement is successful? Furthermore, how best can external consultants assist teachers in carrying out these leadership roles?

These are the issues addressed in this paper. Specifically the paper examines the experiences of a small group of teachers who have taken on leadership roles in schools that have been successful in bringing about improvements in their work. The schools in question are all involved in a school improvement project in England, co-ordinated by a team of tutors at the University of Cambridge Institute of Education. Consequently before examining the work of these teachers we provide a brief outline of the project.

I. *Improving the Quality of Education for All*

During the past three years or so with a team of tutorial colleagues we have been working closely with some thirty schools on a school improvement project known as 'Improving the Quality of Education for All' (IQEA). This project has involved both the schools and ourselves in a collaborative enterprise designed to strengthen their ability to manage change, to enhance the work of teachers, and ultimately to improve the outcomes, however broadly defined, of students. At a time of great changes in the English educational system, the schools we are working with are attempting to use the impetus of external reform for internal purposes.

IQEA works from an assumption that schools are most likely to strengthen their ability to provide enhanced outcomes for all pupils when they adopt ways of working that are consistent with their own aspirations as well as the current reform agenda. This involves building confidence and 'capacity' within the school, rather than reliance on externally produced 'packages' - although good ideas from the outside are never rejected out of hand.

The project in each school is based upon a contract between the staff of the school, the local education authority and ourselves. This contract is intended to clarify expectations and ensure the conditions necessary for success. It also confirms a commitment to work together for at least a year. For our part, the Cambridge team co-ordinate the project; provide training for the school co-ordinators and

representatives; make regular school visits and contribute to staff training; provide staff development materials; and monitor the implementation of the project. For the schools on the other hand, involvement in the project requires the following commitments:

- The decision to participate in the project is made as a result of consultation amongst **all staff** in the school.

- Each school designates a minimum of two members of staff as project co-ordinators (one of whom is the headteacher or deputy head) who attend ten days of training and support meetings (the group of co-ordinators is known as the 'project cadre').

- At least 40% of teachers (representing a cross section of staff) take part in specified staff development activities in their own and each others' classrooms. Each participating teacher is regularly 'released' from teaching in order to participate in these classroom based aspects of the project.

- Teachers are able to use their participation in the project as a basis for accrediting their professional development work.

- Each school participates in the evaluation of the project and share findings with other participants in the project.

- The whole school allocates substantial staff development time to activities related to the project.

The style adopted in the project is to develop a strategy for improvement that allows each school considerable autonomy to determine its own priorities for development and, indeed, its own methods for achieving these priorities. In this sense we (*i.e.* all the partners in the project) are involved in one project within which individual schools devise their own projects.

Within IQEA we place considerable importance on the need for enquiry, reflection and evaluation. The collecting of school-based data of various kinds for purposes of informing planning and development is seen as a powerful element within each school's strategy. Consequently the schools are expected to collect data about progress in establishing conditions for improvement; and, of course, about student and teacher

outcomes. Agreement that these data would be shared is one of the specifications of the project contract.

The journals kept by the project co-ordinators provide a common approach to recording relevant information. In general terms the journals provide a detailed account of events, decisions and processes that occur, as well as summaries of significant outcomes that are noted. Co-ordinators are also requested to write reflective comments, indicating their personal reactions to what occurs and map their involvement in the project over time. In this way individuals can monitor the progress of their school's project and, at the same time, record developments in their own thinking and practice.

Throughout the period of the project the Cambridge tutorial team make regular visits to each school to support co-ordinators in their work and, at the same time, to collect additional data. All these data are systematically processed on a continuous basis in order to build up a clearer picture of the activities going on in each school. These findings are also being fed back to the school in order to inform development processes. In this respect the project can correctly be characterised as a process of collaborative enquiry within which all partners are contributing to its evolution.

From data collected through these processes we are gradually gaining a greater understanding of what goes on in schools that are successful in managing change during a period of intensive innovation. In what follows we draw out some specific messages about the roles that the co-ordinators take on and the impact of actions taken by members of the IQEA project team.

Research Methods

Data were collected from eight teachers in four of the IQEA project schools, the teachers being selected by non-random means. The schools were chosen because we believed there were clear signs that developments were happening in them. We knew the schools from our close contact with them and from working inside them as consultants and advisers. We also drew upon previous investigations we had conducted at these school sites which suggested that these were 'moving' schools (Rosenholtz,1989). The teachers were all members of their respective schools' cadre; that is they were all charged with taking a lead in the schools' improvement projects. The status of the teachers varied from school principal to main grade teacher.

Data were collected by semi-structured interviews. We worked as partners interviewing each teacher on his/her own. Interviews were conducted using a small set of pre-prepared questions. These questions encouraged respondents to talk about the main areas we wished to focus on (i.e. What tasks do you do that seem to have an impact on improvement activities? and, What have members of the IQEA team done that has had an impact on your work?). However, we also used many supplementary questions to pursue points the interviewees had raised. We knew all the teachers well, having worked with them for between 18 and 30 months. Thus we were all reasonably familiar with one another. Throughout the interviews we tried to encourage a dialogue as against an interrogation. Interviews lasted for approximately 45 minutes and were tape recorded with the consent of the teachers. All interviews were conducted in the teachers' schools.

Transcripts of the interviews were subjected to inductive analysis by both of us. At first we worked independently, but once we had each identified some tentative categories we shared our ideas. We refined our initial categories, progressively focused on the emerging categories and used one another to validate and clarify the emerging ideas. Having established for ourselves sets of categories we then tried to identify some larger themes which might explain the meaning of these teachers' actions and the nature of our contribution. In this sense the data have enabled us to sketch out an interpretative explanation of these teachers' leadership and our part in their schools' journeys. It is important to note that the enquiry's findings are tentative and provisional. We are less concerned with causal relations than with trying to understand what has been happening and what it means for school improvement. Moreover, although the insights and themes we have developed are grounded in the data, the interpretations we have produced are, at this stage, ours rather than the teachers.

The analysis we have produced and the interpretations we have placed upon the data reflect what the majority of these teachers said they did or were concerned about. In other words, the pictures we offer of leadership and consultancy are composite pictures. As such, it is the case that not all of the teachers always did these things. Therefore, it is important to say that each of these teachers differed in what they did. Nevertheless, the similarities amongst these teachers outweigh their differences. Across the sample there was a high degree of consistency between the respondents and it is these generally common actions we focus on here.

II. *Leadership*

The teachers' comments on how they were exercising leadership in their schools falls into five categories. These are:

1. Dealing with people
2. Taking a whole school view
3. Keeping up momentum
4. Monitoring developments
5. Establishing a climate

These categories overlap with one another and several interrelate and interpenetrate. So saying, it is nevertheless helpful for the sake of description to present them as distinguishable areas of activity. The five are discussed below and although we have numbered them they are not presented in any order of priority.

1. *Dealing with people*

The teachers made it abundantly clear that they were very aware of the need to create and sustain positive working relations with their colleagues. In many cases they first needed to develop stronger links with their partners in the cadres. Hence they spoke in various ways about working closely together. For example, one senior teacher in a secondary school actively sought out a colleague to partner him in the cadre. He did this because he wanted to work with a "like minded person" and because he wanted to develop shared leadership. It took this pair between two and three months to develop a productive partnership. In another school, one teacher said of her cadre of three teachers that it was " important that the three of us 'gelled'". Another member of this trio said: "It's always been the three of us working together. I think that has been important." Moreover, when he added that it "must come over [to others] that we are a group together" he suggested that he was aware that they were modelling to colleagues a collaborative way of working. In short, these teachers knew that they were leading by example.

At the same time these teachers appreciated that they needed to simultaneously involve others. One spoke about trying "to widen the people involved by selecting people who had been on the fringe" of committees and working parties in the school. In this school training sessions were organised for heads of department partly to keep them informed and to avoid them feeling left out. Another teacher leader set up and involved himself directly in a working party which enabled him to bring in other colleagues. In all the schools there was a wish to involve others and by their own

behaviour and actions these teachers sought to establish and promote a principle of participation. They all wanted a "collegiate style of running a project."

In trying to reach out and bring in other colleagues these teachers knew that it was important both for practical reasons and symbolically to involve colleagues outside the school. Therefore, they invited Local Education Authority (LEA) staff to participate in various ways. Likewise they made use of independent consultants and ourselves by offering us opportunities to contribute to or lead staff meetings and school-based training events. Thus, these teachers not only wanted to develop positive relations in the school, they also wanted to expand the network of relations within and beyond the school site.

Mixed in with all this attention to others was another strand. Intuitively these teachers were concerned with the dynamics of the existing work groups in their respective schools. They wanted not only to ensure that there was a reasonably positive working atmosphere amongst themselves and their colleagues, but also to enhance the effectiveness of the various staff groups. In this way there was a duality to their awareness, they wanted both positive and productive relationships to develop. Hence they wanted to "draw together the staff" and they made strong links with other formal groups in the school, especially senior management teams and school development planning groups. Moreover, they often told us how these groups needed to grow, improve and become more effective. The teachers recognised that often these official and powerful groups were not especially dynamic ones. Some of the teachers felt that there was a lack of sharing in these groups or believed they were inefficient. In this way the teachers seemed to us to be aware that they could play a part in enhancing the performance groups. They seemed to appreciate that the pre-existing groups were sometimes not very mature groups and that they needed to be strengthened if they were to support the school's improvement process.

Tied up with all of this is one other point. Several of these teachers quickly came to realise that in being concerned with staff collaboration they were themselves learning more about working with adults. For some this was new learning since by tradition teachers are trained to work with children and adolescents and not with adults. For others, involvement with IQEA meant that they had to refine their skills in this area. Yet all of them, by virtue of their involvement in the cadre were now leaders of adults as well as teachers of pupils, and all needed to develop their own managerial skills in dealing with people.

2. *Taking a whole school view*

All of the teachers understood that if the improvement projects on which they were embarked were to have any chance of success then they individually and collectively needed to have an overview of their projects and their schools. As one said when summing his own and his partner's work: "I suppose it's keeping an overview of the development and everything." And he added: "I have tried to draw things together." Many of the teachers realised the importance of sharing information with one another and with developing common understandings about the school as a whole. This latter point was vividly illustrated in the case of one pair when one of them described to the other how he saw the school. At the end of his description his partner told him: "The school you described isn't the one I work in!" Not surprisingly these two devoted a lot of time to sharing their observations, knowledge and ideas. And so too did all the other teachers. They all actively sought to broaden and increase one another's organisational knowledge and understanding.

This organisational knowledge was also institutional intelligence because the overviews informed actions. From their mutual awareness of the school the teachers identified what needed to be done, how and by whom. They carefully orchestrated involvements, both of colleagues inside the school and those outside the organisation. One teacher described how she intentionally "mixed up the staff", by which she meant she carefully put different colleagues alongside one another and created alternative groupings to the existing structural arrangements. She added: "I'm basically orchestrating everybody." Others expanded the cadre group in their schools to include others and to ensure "staff have a real voice." In one school it was felt useful to organise a weekend conference for the extended cadre and to invite the head and deputies. This conference gave additional weight to the project and signalled, with the involvement of the head, the significance and seriousness of the enterprise. In some schools specific attention was paid to who led meetings and how these were conducted.

Attention was also paid to resources. Three types of resources in particular figured in the interviews. The first was people as resources to one another, hence the desire to involve many other colleagues. The second resource was time. It was generally acknowledged that if the process of improvement was to have any chance of success then time had to be devoted to it. This meant individuals needed to be released from some of their existing commitments and that time was needed for meetings, planning and staff development activities. Third, there needed to be some financial support. Money was needed to buy time and to pay for staff development events.

Furthermore, it was recognised in all of these schools that if certain changes were to happen then the organisation itself needed to change. In each school important shifts have taken place in organisational structures. In one school more structure has been added to provide time for curriculum development. In another, there was a concerted effort "to get rid of the hierarchical structure." Also in this school, new roles were created for some staff and quality time for meetings was created by re-organising the timetable. Underpinning many of these changes was the recognition and ambition to support people by giving them some task clarity, opportunity and time. There was also an increase in the likelihood that staff would be able to learn with and from one another.

Lastly, the improvement process was further integrated into the work and life of the school through links being created with school development planning. One teacher said: "I do think there is a great feeling of ownership for the school development plan." Another told us how the expanded cadre became "a group of staff concerned with implementing any initiative that was given to them by the school development group." Indeed, one spoke about how everything in her primary school is "Totally integrated, it really is integrated."

3. Keeping up momentum

All the teachers were aware that they needed to implement their school improvement projects and, having got things started keep up the momentum. For example, one teacher spoke about "getting things mobilised", and another talked about how he had produced an action plan to move the project forward.

Getting started seemed to be less of an issue than keeping things going. The teachers attempted to keep the projects moving by making good use of formal and informal communication systems in the school. In terms of the formal means they generally relied on two events. They used staff meetings for brief progress reports and senior management team meetings to share concerns and to enlist additional help and support. Informally they used more varied means. Some spent a lot of time after school talking with colleagues individually and in groups. One said she spent "a heck of a lot a time" talking. Another said she deliberately would go and look for someone to talk to as well as more often "just generally sitting around in the staffroom." This latter comment is echoed by a different teacher speaking about how she relied on "informal chat, all chat." Throughout all this talking the aim was to try to be positive about the developments and "to explain why we were doing it." Another teacher spoke about visiting colleagues in their classrooms to encourage them to talk about their work.

According to the teachers all this talk was beneficial because it was appreciated by colleagues that they were being supported and that an interest was being taken in their work. Also, these conversations helped to develop professional dialogue and a common language in each of the schools. One of the teachers who was very consciously using talk to shape developments in the school believed professional discussion was important because; "I think unless you can articulate it you actually don't know that you are doing it." In other words, the process of talking was a process of project realisation. At the same this teacher was aware that in creating a *lingua franca* of school development she was also simultaneously helping to change the nature of professional discourse in her school by eradicating some language. She gave the following as an example: "We try never to talk about 'they' because 'they' have been very powerful and I say there isn't a 'they', it's **us** - what are **we** going to do?" In a sense this teacher was aware that certain forms of language can be disenfranchising and she wanted to ensure that colleagues were empowered. In such a way, and in many others, these teachers sought to maintain the impetus of their schools' projects.

4. ***Monitoring developments***

Many of the teachers we interviewed recognised the importance of monitoring what was happening in the school and how their projects were being implemented. They spoke of "reviewing progress", of writing progress reports for other groups in the school and of "evaluating" how their respective projects were going.

In particular they focused on whether there was too much or too little pressure on staff. One teacher recognised that she was very "visible around the school" and that this in itself was a form of pressure on colleagues to make things happen. Another spoke about "consciously watching" to see whether there were too many advisory people working in one area of the school. In effect she was checking that involvements and resources were balanced out and not over burdening her colleagues.

All the teachers tacitly accepted that managing change involved over coming difficulties and encountering setbacks. These were regarded as natural occurrences since they recognised that change creates turbulence in the school. Many of the interviewees spoke about interpersonal tensions and strains. For example, one said: "You get your discords and falling out and all that." Another said; "not everybody gets on with everybody, it isn't possible, but we professionally aspire to work together."

Related to these concerns about the social dynamic amongst staff was an awareness that there is a micropolitical dimension to school improvement. We did not explore this dimension, but we nevertheless recognised that these teachers were conscious of the political currents in their schools. For example, one talked about drawing in colleagues who "would be on my side." Consequently, there was some mention of these teachers negotiating with colleagues how or whether they would be involved with the innovations. One obvious concern of these teachers' colleagues was that the projects they were managing would result in extra work for anyone who participated. To overcome this potential obstacle, one teacher leader boldly said to her colleagues: "I absolutely categorically promise you that your extra work will ultimately affect the quality of what you're doing in the classroom." She made this deal with her colleagues because she felt that as long as they believed that, "they will really do anything and I'm exactly the same, it was my motivation as a teacher. If I know that all the energy, all the hours and the time and all the hurt of change, if it is actually going to have an impact on the classroom in a very positive way, then it is worth the price."

In other words, these teachers observed the organizational and interpersonal tensions that arose from their projects. They negotiated with individuals and groups, bargaining with some and striking deals with others. For these teachers monitoring the change process was not a passive and watchful activity, rather it was active and interactive. Moreover, it required these teachers to become players and participants in the political drama of the school.

5. *Establishing a climate*

So far we have described *what* these teachers said they did but not *how*. Here we want to identify briefly the ways in which these teachers worked. Four strategies were particularly noticeable. First, in all these schools careful use was made of ***staff development*** to promote the project, to involve colleagues and to equip staff to implement innovations. Second, the quality of ***talk*** in the schools was regarded as important because much relies on the capacity of the staff to exchange ideas, share problems and find common solutions. Third, a great deal of ***negotiation*** took place both between members of the cadre and between them and other colleagues. Discussions and debates occurred to explain and promote the projects and as a consequence of this dialogue deals were struck and plans agreed. Fourth, at particular points in several of the schools, there came a time when problems or issues needed to be ***confronted***. In a number of the schools we have seen that after a while it is necessary to face up to what is actually happening, when allowances can no longer be made for certain individuals or groups and when frankness and resolution are needed.

Overall, these processes and all the other points we have noted about these teachers' leadership helped to establish a climate that seemed to have five characteristics. These were:

- reassurance
- confidence
- risk taking
- empowerment
- openness

Much of what these teachers did helped to assuage their colleagues' doubts and concerns about managing change or coping with yet another development. From this sense of reassurance came confidence. The interviewed teachers themselves grew in stature in their own eyes and in the eyes of their colleagues, whilst their commitment to participation and their wish to involve other staff also helped colleagues to appreciate that this project was not yet another contrivance of management, but a genuine collegial venture. The combination of commitment and reassurance also helped these teachers to take some risks. For example, they spoke their minds to senior colleagues and experimented with new structures and activities. Moreover, several of these teachers clearly enjoyed and revelled in their new responsibilities and felt able to play a significant role in the work of their school.

However, perhaps the most notable characteristic of the five is the sense of openness which was reported by these teachers as developing in their schools. One spoke about "opening minds", another contrasted how the school had been "quite closed" but now there were "possibilities to open things up" and a third told us that changes in the school's atmosphere had "opened up some possibilities." According to these teachers' reports, their schools were becoming less shuttered and sealed and more receptive to ideas. Their schools had begun to change as organisations, they were becoming more porous and permeable to the outside and to innovation. Indeed, they were less like psychic prisons and more like schools; that is learning organisations, a point we will return to in section four.

III. *Consultancy*

The other important agenda for our discussion with the teachers focused on our work as consultants attached to their schools as part of the IQEA project. Here our concern was which (if any) of our activities had had an impact upon their work as cadre

members. This agenda raises a rather obvious methodological issue in that essentially we were asking the teachers to comment upon the work of ourselves and our fellow IQEA team members. Consequently, we have to recognise that the nature of the data gathered was influenced by this factor in ways which are impossible to determine. Nevertheless the discussions did, at times, take on a critical edge which suggests that the teachers were prepared to delve into areas of our activities about which they had some reservations. Certainly the discussions provided a fascinating 'mirror' on our practices, reflecting back to us a series of images about what it is we are perceived to do.

Once again our scrutiny of the data collected led us to identify five categories of activity which help to summarise the teachers' views about what they have noted us doing within the IQEA project. Specifically they point to those of our responses that are seen as having some impact upon the work of these eight teachers as they take on leadership roles within their schools. The five categories are as follows

1. Pushing thinking forward
2. Framing the issues
3. Encouraging partnerships
4. Providing incentives
5. Modelling ways of working

As we present our analysis of the teachers' responses it will become evident that they point to a series of tensions that seem to arise when teachers take on leadership roles. The data also throw light on certain dilemmas faced by the IQEA team as they work with the project schools.

It will become clear from our analysis that many of the teachers experienced difficulty in articulating quite which elements of IQEA had had an impact on their thinking and practice. Indeed most had some problems in recalling tangible aspects of the project. As one teacher put it, "The project is kind of amorphous - it's been a general atmosphere".

After a little prompting however, all of the teachers were able to describe particular events or ideas that had been introduced as a result of project activities, and as the discussions developed more and more attention was focused on matters of process. This emphasis is reflected in the five sets of activities summarised below.

1. *Pushing thinking forward*

Although much of the emphasis in the discussion was on process issues, the teachers did make reference to certain types of input from the IQEA team. We can look at these inputs in terms of two contexts. The first concerns inputs provided during out-of-school meetings, when cadre members from different schools assembled; and second, inputs provided by team members within schools during meetings of groups of teachers or as part of staff development sessions, often for all the staff of a school.

The out-of-school gatherings usually take the form of whole day sessions at UCIE which involve lectures, activities intended to stimulate discussion of relevant themes and, in addition, time set aside for school cadre groups to hold planning meetings. Leading these sessions presents a number of dilemmas for the project team, not least that of trying to choose topics that will be relevant at a given time for the various school groups. Our interviews led to some encouraging feedback regarding this particular issue. Whilst some teachers made reference to "sometimes switching off' during discussions that seemed irrelevant, the majority did not see it as a problem. Indeed, a couple of teachers felt that we seemed to have an uncanny knack of hitting the current issues in their schools. One noted, "Almost by magic the IQEA sessions always seem to be where we are at." It may be that the overall style adopted during these sessions, that of framing the various activities within a series of questions to be explored, is helpful in allowing participants to construct their own working agendas. Certainly a number of the teachers referred to the sessions encouraging them to look at issues from different perspectives, thus forcing them to consider new possibilities for addressing their development strategies.

Some teachers noted more specific inputs that had impacted upon their work. For example, one referred to a recent session on the issue of 'involvement' that had led to significant developments with respect to how his school utilises students and parents in supporting improvement activities.

Overall, however, references to IQEA sessions focused mainly on general statements about their success in pushing thinking forward. One teacher's comments are indicative of this theme. She noted that the sessions " influence my thinking, direct me towards reading, in fact do my reading for me." She went on to say, "I thrive on that. I go home and I'm still thinking about it." In a similar vein another teacher remarked, "It's not as if we go away from each meeting and spend hours reading either, it's been self-contained."

It seems that the stimulus to thinking reported here is also encouraged by the fact the teachers attend the sessions with other colleagues from their schools. This means that they can debrief the experience of the day together, often in the car going back, or during subsequent days. Our request that they should take responsibility for sharing ideas from the sessions with the rest of their staff also seems to encourage a deeper engagement with the topic under consideration.

The teachers were all positive about the involvement of members of the IQEA team within their schools. Reference was made to ways in which these visits had helped the school in connection with specific developments such as the introduction of teacher appraisal. On other occasions the impact might have been on the way in which such developments were being implemented. For example, in one school an IQEA team member had impressed on staff the idea that "decisions should be made at the lowest level possible."

Once again, however, these inputs were seen most significantly in terms of their impact upon the thinking of the teachers. As one put it, "You guys have infected our ways of thinking" (This reference to 'infection' did make us wonder whether the project should have a health warning on its publicity).

Impacting upon people's thinking can lead to certain negative effects. In a number of schools the development of the ideas of cadre members seems to have created tensions between them and their colleagues, who, it appears, may have found expressions of unfamiliar concepts rather threatening.

Another important dimension to the work of the IQEA team in schools relates to staff development. Here the emphasis placed on school-based staff development activities included a strong element of work in classrooms, and was seen as being very positive. A significant feature of this was its capacity to "stimulate creative discussion." One teacher compared all of this to her previous experience of attending a masters degree course which was far less influential, she felt, because "it didn't have any involvement with the organisation."

Again, however, the introduction of this emphasis on school-based staff development did create tensions in some schools, when it was perceived by some colleagues as being in conflict with existing practices. In one school, for example, staff development was seen as an 'entitlement' to go out of school in order to attend short courses. The IQEA approach, with its heavy emphasis on within-school staff

development activities, was seen as a potential threat to this well established avenue for spending time away from the building.

2. ***Framing the issues***

In our interactions with teachers in the IQEA project schools we try to resist any temptation to impose ways of working from elsewhere. At times this can create further dilemmas for us. In particular the fact that we are paid to assist the schools in their improvement efforts means that we are keen to provide the best available knowledge. On the other hand, we are committed to enabling schools to develop their own capacities for managing change. This being the case we attempt to work in ways that maintain the locus of control regarding all aspects of the project firmly within each participating school.

It is interesting, therefore, to note the way in which the teachers in our sample made so many references to our ways of working. Undoubtedly these have had far more impact than the actual content of our inputs.

Where our work had been particularly influential it seemed to involve us in a process of helping teachers to frame their problems and consider a range of possible ways forward. One teacher referred to this as "channelling our thoughts." The data provides some useful pointers as to what are the key factors in this framing approach to working with teachers involved in leading development activities.

The first factor seems to involve the mapping of possibilities. Teachers reported that during IQEA meetings they found it helpful to analyse what currently happens in their schools through some form of auditing. Then, having carried out the audit, they found it valuable to be involved in activities designed to establish new possibilities for action. This might take the form of a short lecture or some type of co-operative group work. The important dimension seemed to be that these activities encouraged the teachers to view their own school through "fresh pairs of eyes." In this way the outcomes of the audit could be reconsidered, leading sometimes to the recognition of an appropriate way forward.

Associated with the process of mapping was a second key factor, that of talk. Many of the teachers reported the importance of having "quality time" to talk about their work. It seems that the typical day in an English school provides very little opportunity for such talk to take place. Consequently the visit of a member of the IQEA team, or a trip out of school with a colleague to attend a project meeting,

provides a firm boundary within which such discussions can take place. On some occasions, also, the way in which activities are framed during the IQEA meetings facilitate talk by providing terminology and, indeed, creating a structured context that close colleagues can use to open up discussion that may be impossible to stage within the usual school day.

Many examples were cited of when IQEA team members had assisted groups of staff to resolve issues within their school by asking a series of probing questions or, indeed, challenging colleagues to address matters that were being in some way tactically avoiders. One teacher described how one team member had confronted a school group that he felt had achieved a false consensus by ignoring differences of opinion that existed between them. Reference was made to how he had "bollocked" the group and that subsequently this had led to a 'clearing of the air' and, as a result, much more open discussion of different possibilities for action.

Whilst what we are calling a 'framing' approach to the intervention in the project schools seems to have been welcomed in general it does have the potential to create conflict. In particular, the emphasis placed on staff participation can engender turbulence in organisations that have a tradition of top-down decision-making. This feature was apparent in two of these schools. In one, for example, a teacher observed that "the style of the project said that development comes from staff needs and by staff identifying a way forward for themselves." As a result she noted a tension in her own organisation, where this had evidently not been the tradition, and, significantly, felt that she "was in the middle of this tension."

3. ***Encouraging partnerships***

As we have noted the work of teachers acting as leaders of school improvement activities creates a number of potential difficulties for them. In a sense they enter a kind of "no man's land" between their colleagues in the staff room and the senior management team. In acting in the interests of the whole school they may, on the one hand, be seen as agents of authority, whilst on the other hand, they are wanting to be perceived as acting on behalf of the staff. This may be experienced in different ways from school to school, but it is undoubtedly a source of pressure for cadre members.

This being the case it was encouraging to hear many of the teachers refer to their positive feelings, about their work, many of them talking with obvious delight and pride in what they and their colleagues had achieved. They also spoke in some detail about the impact of all of this on their own thinking and practice. One teacher seemed

to sum up these feelings when she said, "It's a lovely feeling to be deeply involved in something."

Important to this overall feeling of confidence about what had happened seemed to be the concept of partnerships. Whilst these teachers frequently found themselves having to face difficult and, at times, stressful situations, the existence of partnerships of various forms seemed to be an enormous source of strength. An important dimension to all of this seemed to be the partnership that teachers felt they had with various members of the IQEA team. As one teacher put it, "I don't know if I would have been so confident in doing it if we hadn't got support from Cambridge."

However, it was recognised that this feeling of partnership with colleagues from the somewhat alien world of the university had had to be carefully nurtured over time. One teacher noted, "Initially I looked to you as the experts. I have learned to sort it out between us."

At times of particular turbulence within the school the presence of an 'outside' partner proved to be particularly valuable. On one occasion, for example, it was reported that a member of the IQEA team had "had to come in and really hold our hands and reassure us that this is actually alright."

Through their involvement in IQEA the teachers felt that they had become more skilful in establishing working partnerships with colleagues within their schools. A number also referred to having become more effective at working with outside agencies, such as LEA advisers. Speaking of one particular adviser, a teacher recalled that his visits were "exceptionally valuable." She noted that "it has made me think that in my role as professional development officer I want to develop that kind of partnership, with those kind of contacts; the way in which he came in and was completely non-threatening, absolutely open and honest. I really enjoyed the way he'd say, well fax me, it doesn't matter what time of day or the evening."

Perhaps more than anything else the various types of working partnership encouraged by IQEA seemed to have the effect of confirming people in what they were doing and, at the same time, making them feel valued. One teacher referred to the feeling that it was now recognised that there was "a proper job to be done." The partnerships seemed to support people in doing this 'proper job' by creating closer working relationships within which colleagues could share ideas, solve problems together and, as we have seen, assist one another during moments of discomfort.

4. *Providing incentives*

Keeping school improvement initiatives going over a period of years presents a number of difficulties. Circumstances change, new priorities arise and, of course, key personnel may move on. In addition, of course, the schools in this sample have been grappling with the requirements of an extensive range of externally driven innovations arising from the Government's reform agenda. As they seek to bring about improvements in their work the schools have to respond to all of these new requirements, involving radical changes in policies for curriculum, assessment and finance. Consequently it is very easy to get distracted from the overall purpose. The four schools in our sample have been particularly successful in keeping their impetus going despite the difficulties they face and we were interested to know if any of our actions had been of assistance in this respect.

Most of the teachers described how our visits to the school create deadlines. The fact that they know we are about to make a visit often seems to act as a spur to action. Some reported how on occasions the momentum had been lost and that they faced our visits with a certain amount of anxiety. More positively, however, many felt that the visits provided an incentive to get on with their work.

The teachers suggested that discussions with the IQEA team were often helpful in defining ways forward and, therefore, in giving a much clearer sense of direction to their work. It was also good to report on what had happened to an outside audience and, in so doing, recognise achievements that might otherwise have gone unnoticed.

In this way meetings with IQEA team members sometimes became celebrations that enhanced feelings of motivation. In a similar way it was felt that opportunities to meet with teachers from other schools participating in the project provided further incentives, including sometimes a certain amount of competition between them. As one teacher noted, "listening to other schools we're much further down the road in terms of development."

5. *Modelling ways of working*

As we have already emphasised, the discussions with these teachers focused more on the process of our involvement in their work than the content. It seems that it has been the way that members of the IQEA team carry out their work that has had the most noticeable impact. Central to this seems to be a process of modelling how

groups of adults can learn how to be more effective in collaborating in getting tasks completed.

A number of the teachers described in very specific terms how team members had become tacit 'role models', who they had followed in carrying out their work with colleagues in school, For example one teacher noted, "It was quite interesting watching, especially at the start, how pairs of you would work together and with us. Sometimes you would talk things through in front of us when you had a dilemma... Watching you talking through conflicting views was quite important." She went on to describe how she and her two colleagues had carefully planned and rehearsed how they would replicate this approach with teams of teachers in their school. She noted that, "some of the actual strategies you used with us to get us to work together when we are in Cambridge we would use with our colleagues."

Another teacher reported that working with members of the IQEA team had helped her to recognise that "staff teams weren't managed as they should be." She described how she "tried to copy the way you worked back with my department." The features she particularly tried to incorporate were sharing responsibility with group members and making people feel valued.

Others described how our system of working mainly in pairs had encouraged them to explore the development of partnerships in a much more conscious way. As one teacher saw it, the basic rationale of this is that "nobody has all the answers." Where this had been successful people were very enthusiastic about its impact upon improvement activities. This was best summed up by the remark, "suddenly it was a group of people trying to work together not trying to score points."

The modelling of ways of working with colleagues was also commented upon in some instances in connection with a further issue, that of creating 'openness' within which colleagues would be prepared to explore alternative perspectives and possible ways forward. At its best this provided a supportive climate within which colleagues felt able to explore aspects of one another's classroom practice. For one teacher this was the most significant contribution of IQEA, confirming her belief in the idea of classrooms as 'centres of enquiry'.

IV. Discussion

In this section we want to look at both sets of findings and try to discern what they might mean for school improvement.

First, we want to acknowledge that there is apparently very little here which is new, either in terms of leadership or of consultancy. In one sense our findings are all too familiar to those who have studied the processes of school improvement. For example, across the five categories we used to examine leadership we can see that these teachers believed in the 'primacy of personal contact' (Fullan,1991, p.132), used a blend of 'pressure and support' (p.106), tacitly acknowledged that implementation was a 'process of clarification' (p.106) and were confronting the cultures of their schools and seeking to make their cultures more collaborative and their schools more collegial (p.133). In other words, our findings broadly support Fullan's analysis of the meaning of educational change.

Similarly these findings confirm evidence from elsewhere about the key tasks necessary for external consultants to have an impact during school improvement interventions. They mirror, for example, the findings of Saxl et al (1987) who found that certain core skills pervade the work of those who are successful in assisting teachers during staff development initiatives. Like ours, their findings point to the importance of certain processes, such as "open communication, clarifying expectations, legitimizing the role and, addressing resistance" (p.10).

However, research is not only interesting for what it shows, but also because of what it leads one onto see. In this sense we want to use the findings as a spur to our thinking and perception. And in this sense we believe there is another way of looking at our findings and of interpreting the data. This second level of interpretation is not at odds with the first, rather it is a complementary extension to the first. We say this because we want to take Fullan's idea that change is learning (p.45) and use it to develop some ideas.

The notion that change is learning seems to us to be increasingly important not so much as a metaphor about change, but as a reality for teachers managing change. For example, at the close of the previous section we noted how one teacher found in IQEA confirmation that classrooms are 'centres of enquiry'. Moreover, IQEA itself is a process of collaborative enquiry. Professional learning is a constant in these teachers' lives and should not be overlooked, nor should the fact that these people are teachers be taken for granted. Let us try to elaborate on these ideas.

As leaders these teachers were in many ways seeking to create in their schools a climate for colleagues to learn with and from one another. As we noted above, these teachers were striving to make their schools learning organisations. They were contributing to the development of professional learning environments in their respective schools. Such environments would be open, that is, there would be collegial receptivity to ideas and alternatives, as well as a great deal of mutual help and support from staff members. From such interaction would flow not only practical advice and psychological support, but also joint work. Hence the learning climate would foster and sustain teacher collaboration. In turn, both the climate and the collaborative culture would enable teacher and staff development because there would be many opportunities to work with and learn from colleagues (Nias, Southworth and Campbell, 1992). In other words, the creation of an open climate in the school was not an end in itself, but a means to fostering an environment in which staff could become better teachers.

The process of developing and strengthening the school as a learning environment was a journey towards making the school a learning community for children and adults alike. Furthermore, it was implicitly accepted that although such an environment would be positive and supportive, there also needed to be collegial challenge and that external agents had a part to play in questioning existing practices and enabling colleagues to examine their professional assumptions and beliefs.

Two interrelated points need to be highlighted about this notion of challenge. First, these teachers' tacitly recognised that amongst the adults in their schools there needed to exist a healthy interpersonal and interprofessional dynamic. The learning environments in their schools needed to be sufficiently 'safe' to foster open discussion. Communication, especially talk, is of major importance in enabling individuals to reaffirm and develop ideas, values and, at the same time, the groups of which they are a part. Talk helps the staff as a group to speak a common language. Moreover, communication develops within the groups the capacity not only for shared understandings but also for support. Positive and constructive communication encourages more rather than less communication and assists individuals to face anxiety, conflict and reluctance to change.

Second, given this relatively 'safe' environment, which encourages the free exchange of ideas and establishes a shared language and a common set of understandings about one's work and colleagues, then it will bring with it an accompanying climate of enquiry and growth (Whitaker,1986). When individuals share ideas and exchange

their professional views there is often a sense of 'encounter'. Differing beliefs can be contrasted and compared, assumptions can be made overt and exposed to scrutiny, practices defended against contrary approaches and the underlying philosophies explained and reasoned. Therefore, there will be much argument and debate and the sharing of professional differences. In this way the staff become a community of learners and do not create a culture of comfort and cosiness. The groups of which the teachers and staff are active members provide an environment for 'perspective transformation' (Mezirow,1981), that is, they facilitate opportunities for individuals and teams to share ideas, examine their own educational beliefs and perspectives and modify their professional practice. The process and the product of such learning environments is transformational and educative.

If this begins to sketch out the deeper meaning of what these teachers were trying to accomplish it nevertheless does not explain why they chose to do so. At this stage we have identified two reasons which seem to explain this picture. In setting out these ideas here we wish to make it plain that at present these 'reasons' are speculations rather than 'truths'.

First, these eight teachers were keen to develop a climate of learning in their schools because they were teacher-leaders. They brought to their leadership what their professional experience had taught them about influencing and developing others, namely they wanted to change their colleagues by establishing processes in their schools which were inherently educative. Just as they knew from their teaching that one needs to create in the classroom a positive learning environment, they also applied this experience to their new responsibilities to improve the quality of the school. Moreover, they were aware that just as there can be no curriculum development without teacher development (Stenhouse,1975), so there can be no school improvement without staff development. And they were aware of these maxims because of their own professional development prior to participating in IQEA and as a consequence of being involved in the cadres. These teachers were thus educative leaders. They were not drawing upon models of leadership derived from commercial or military settings; instead they were largely behaving as they would in their classrooms and utilising their knowledge of professional development to create a particular kind of organisational culture in their schools. This can be called a collaborative culture (Nias, Southworth & Yeomans,1989), but that is only one side of the coin. What these teachers were trying to do was install a collaborative culture because it creates trust, security and openness and, at the same time, sustain a set of relationships inside and outside their schools which facilitate professional growth and organisational development (see Nias, Southworth & Campbell, 1992). These teachers

had a fundamental belief in the power of professional learning and saw themselves as the leading learners in respect of their schools' projects.

Second, all of them understood that it was far from easy to create a learning environment and a collaborative culture. They needed help and support every bit as much as their colleagues. In particular they needed to know how adults learn since many were aware that they could not always apply their classroom knowledge of child development to the staffroom and to their colleagues' learning. This is where our work as consultants comes into the picture. They consciously and unconsciously watched what we did and took from us such ways of working as appeared relevant to their situations. They used us to give confidence to their colleagues and themselves and to provide some challenge and external perspectives to their schools' projects. Importantly, they saw and watched how we worked as individuals, pairs and as a team and tried to deploy these ways of working in their schools and with one another. Their direct involvement in IQEA was yet another learning opportunity for these eight teachers. In a sense when they worked with us at Cambridge and in their schools we, like them, were trying to set a climate of learning which, in turn, was transported into their schools. The medium of IQEA is the message.

Some final thoughts

In broad and general terms then, our small scale, modest and speculative study has led us to see that these teachers are engaging with three closely interrelated levels of activity in their schools. First, they are striving in diverse ways to change, deepen and broaden their own and their colleagues' perceptions of their schools. They are seeking to increase awareness of the school as an organisation, develop collaborative enquiry and to examine more carefully the quality of the teaching and learning which the pupils receive. In subtle ways there is a pervasive attempt to transform teacher perspectives in these schools.

Second, as professional dialogue develops, as groups become more dynamic, as interaction becomes more formally structured, as informal talk becomes more supportive, as self examination increases and as the staff dynamic becomes more challenging, then the schools' cultures begin to alter. The workplace conditions shift and a productive blend of collegial challenge and support emerges.

Third, the collaborative culture facilitates professional learning. This culture is educative and opportunities for individual and institutional growth increase. Moreover, because of the involvement of several external agents (ourselves but also many others) as well as these teachers' links with other cadre groups, this process of professional growth is not necessarily normative, nor is it strongly bounded. The inherently insular nature of school-based development is thus avoided. Alternative and supplementary frames of reference are available and the schools' capacities to develop enhanced.

Having said all of that we believe that there is yet another level of activity that is necessary if improvement initiatives are to have a profound and lasting impact upon the learning of students. Going beyond attention to overall structural and cultural changes, there is stil' ' need to develop more specific strategies for helping teachers as they attempt to interpret overall school improvement in terms of their own practice. This deeper level, intruding, as it must, on the privacy of each teacher's classroom, presents even greater challenges to those who take on leadership and consultancy roles.

Finally, we need to add that in outlining these levels of activity we have undoubtedly over simplified the picture and the action in the schools. None of what we have portrayed here is easy, straightforward or clear. Like the process of learning itself, there is much ambiguity, uncertainty, pressure and pain. School improvement may be a journey but it is an arduous, difficult and puzzling one for all involved.

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